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TWO
LETTERS
TO A
FRIEND:

CONTAINING
Certain Considerations
Relating to the PULPIT.

LICENSED, *Feb. 20. 169 $\frac{1}{2}$.*



L O N D O N,
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TWO LETTERS to a FRIEND, &c.

First LETTER.

S I R,

I Have received your Letter, wherein you desire me to give you my Thoughts upon certain Particulars relating to the PULPIT: The Subject being of an Ecclesiastical nature, really I did at first resolve to put you upon applying, for Satisfaction, to some Clergy-man, apprehending one of that Order to be the fittest Person to discuss such Matters: But fearing lest you should interpret my so doing, to proceed only from a Desire of being excused the Trouble my self: And calling to mind, That though many of our Friends of the Clergy are Gentlemen of as free and generous Thoughts, as any Men whatever; yet peradventure you might be apt to think the Opinion of a Lay-Friend more free from all suspicion of Interest and Byass, than that of a Clergy-man, in a matter so nearly relating to their Function. I say, upon these accounts I altered my Purpose in that particular; so now I have composed my self to return you an Answer, which I shall endeavour to form with all the brevity and plainness I can; hoping your Candour will supply what is wanting, and your exact Judgment correct what is amiss: And I doubt not but, how mean soever my performance may be, you will accept of it, as 'tis an instance of my Obedience to your Commands.

As touching the Necessity or Use of *Preaching*, (which you make the matter of your first Enquiry) I believe we are both agreed, that it may, in general, be very truly affirmed, That *Preaching* is of great Use in the Christian Church: Mankind being very subject to Vice and Errour, need faithful Monitors. There are a great many things fit to be known, which People generally do not well understand; and a great many fit to be practised, which they are generally too apt to forget. Now since it is a Preacher's part to instruct them in the former, and to put them in mind of the latter, and that so, as not only to set them right in Notion, but also chiefly, by solid Arguments and Motives, to enforce the just practice of Christian Duties: And since Men are, and 'tis likely will be in all Ages, prone to Vice and Errour, there is, and will be, a standing and perpetual Use of *Preaching*.

But you will pardon me, that I cannot undertake to define how much *Preaching* may be necessary in this Age; that is, how frequent, or of what length Sermons now-a-days ought to be. I have no Authority to decide such Questions; and I am the more willing to decline giving my Opinion in that Case, because I cannot find that the Scripture has left us any universal Rules, equally binding in all Times, whereby to ascertain this matter. But, on the contrary, as the thing in its own nature, seems to fall under great Variation, according as the Circumstances of Times and Places may vary; so it appears most reasonable, That the Passages hitherto referable, which occur in the Scripture, be interpreted with a due regard to the foresaid Variation of Circumstances in Times and Places respectively: For where a thing is more or less necessary or useful, as the Occasions and Circumstances of Mankind do make it more or less so; there the consideration of those Circumstances is the best Medium for adjusting the degree of its Necessity or Use. I am to be excused making such an Adjustment with relation to our Times; but the Medium I leave with you, to be used as your best Reason shall direct. And, I believe, the due consideration

sideration of the Difference of Times, Places, and Persons, and such-like Circumstances, would be a useful means to remove a great many of the Misapprehensions which several People seem to have; not only in the Case before us, but also in many other. When Men have persuaded themselves that whatever is spoken in the Scripture, relates equally to all Times and Persons, and is to be construed like an Universal Proposition, or First Principle, they cannot avoid entertaining, in many Cases, precarious Sentiments. To be short, the sum of what I shall at present endeavour to make out to you, upon the foot of your Enquiry, will be, in general, this, That *Preaching* is of greater Necessity or Utility in some Times, than in others : And if the discussion of this matter do not fully satisfy the Demand of your Enquiry, you may, if you please, in your next, direct me to a more particular Answer.

Now although, in general, Preaching be, as I said before, useful in all Times, yet it would be harsh to say, That it is no more, nor no less useful in some Times, than in others. 'Tis plain to me, that there may be, in the same Country, a greater occasion for it at one time, than at another time ; and a greater at the same time in one Country, than in another Country, according as the Exigency of the Cases respectively may be. The great End for which Preaching was instituted, is for the Good of the Church, or Mankind ; and so it must accordingly be more or less necessary, as the state of the Church, or Mankind, does more or less require or stand in need of it. And as the state of the Church is variable, and has actually varied in the several Ages of the World ; so the Necessity, or Use of this Institution, which is dependent upon the state of the Church, must likewise vary with it. Thus also, as to particular Persons, it must be confessed, That Preaching is of greater use, with respect to Ignorant and Vicious Persons, than to knowing and Vertuous ones : For it being designed as a Remedy against Ignorance and Vice, common Sense forbids us to think, that a very knowing Man stands in need of it, as 'tis a Remedy
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against Ignorance, equally with a very Ignorant Man, or a very Vertuous Man, as 'tis a remedy against Vice, equally with a very Vicious one. This would be as absurd as to affirm, that a Man in health wants a Physician, as much as one that's Sick ; or that one who has his Limbs entire, needs a Bone-setter as much as he that has a Leg or Arm broken. Not but that Preaching is of great use, even to Knowing and Vertuous Persons ; but still in a lower degree to them, than to the Ignorant and Vicious. The reason of things tells us, that in such cases as these, there is a relative and variable necessity or Use. Now if these instances shew, That Preaching is of greater use at some times than at others, and to some Persons than to others : Then by consequence, it is not of the same degree of necessity or use at all times, and with respect to all Persons.

But for the clearer Illustration of this matter, give me leave to put you in mind of the great difference between the Commission and Duty of the Apostles, and first Planters of our Faith, with respect to Preaching, and that of Ordinary Ministers in after-ages. For if there really be a great difference in the case, it seemeth very natural to conclude, that those places of Scripture which relate, at least Principally, to the Preaching of the First Ages of the Church, are not to be absolutely and unlimitedly applied to Ministers in all Ages, but to be construed according to the reason of Things, and Analogy or Difference of Cases.

Now if I should only Instance in the extraordinary Powers that were annexed to the Commissions of the Apostles, and First Preachers of Christianity, such as were the Gifts of Tongues, Miracles, Healings, &c. (which Powers were continued so long, as the State of the Church required, and stood in need of them, but afterwards ceased by the same degrees, (for ought we know) as the Necessity or Use of them began to lessen) This would shew that the Function of Preaching hath, as to its Concomitant Powers, and as to the manner of exercising it, received great variation, according to the difference of Times, and the exigency of the

the Affairs of Mankind; to which as it seemeth, God Almighty hath been pleased all along to accommodate his Dispensations. And from thence it would be Natural to infer, That as the aforesaid extraordinary Powers, which originally accompanied the Institution of Preaching, were continued proportionably to the necessities of the Church, and afterwards ceased when there was no longer occasion for them in the Church: So, by like Analogy, the strict Duty in executing that Institution, which might originally, for reasons then in force be necessary, may justly be relaxed when those Reasons come to lose their force; that is, when there shall be less occasion for it than there was at first. I will not now stay to insist on this matter at large; but because there are some other points of difference between the Commission and Duty of the Apostles, and that of Ordinary Ministers in after Ages, which more immediately concern our present Enquiry, I intreat your patience whilst I enumerate some of them. This I shall do very briefly.

1. You know, the Apostles were sent out by our Lord, to spread the Gospel over the World, at a time when Mankind were totally Ignorant of the Mysteries, and peculiar Doctrines of the Christian Faith. Men could never have discovered the Mysteries of the Gospel by Natural light, as both the Nature of the thing shews; and *St. Paul* attests in *1 Cor. Chap. 2*. Nor could they Learn the same from any others, except from those who had received the Revelation thereof from God, to wit, from the Apostles or first Preachers. *Men could not believe on Him of whom they had not heard, nor could they hear without a Preacher, nor could they Preach, unless they were sent.* Now in this Case, Preaching was not only an Effectual, but, humanely speaking, the only way to communicate the knowledge of these things to all the World. But it is easie to discern a great difference between the Case of these first Preachers, and that of Ministers settled, as at this day in particular Diocesses, Parishes, or Cures in Countries, where the Christian Faith is become

become National, and Men imbibe it as it were with their Mother's Milk.

2. 'Tis apparent, that before the Gospel was committed to Writing, Preaching was absolutely necessary for propagating it. Upon this account, *St. Paul* might well say, *Faith cometh by hearing*. We have reason to believe, that the Gospel was Preached for several years together, before it was committed to Writing; that some parts of it were written before other some; that they had the Copies thereof in some Cities or Countries, before they had them in others. Now during these respective Intervals of time, the Christian Faith was in a manner kept up and maintained by Oral Preaching. These circumstances might make frequent and Iterated Preachings very necessary, lest the Christian Profelytes, having no standing or written System of what they had heard, to have recourse unto, should either relinquish their holy Profession, or depart from the Purity thereof in Doctrine or Manners. But the Case is very different now, since the Gospel was committed to Writing, and left in our hands to be read: which as it is generally acknowledged to be written very plainly and intelligibly, as far as relates to necessary Things; so it lies open to every Body's perusal, and is constantly read in our Churches.

3. The first Preachers of the Gospel were to encounter with the fixt and inveterate Prejudices of Men, who were firmly attached to the Customs and Religion of their Country. Experience shews, of what mighty Force, Prejudice and Education are, especially in matters of Religion. So it always was, for ought we know, and perhaps always will be. For the *Jews* on the one hand, to give up their Temple and Priesthood, their Sabbaths and Feasts, their Rites and Customs, for all which they had so deep a Veneration; in a word, to relinquish the Covenant made with their Forefathers, and the glorious expectations they had of Grandeur and Empire under their Messias, and instead of the Law of *Moses*, to receive another Institution upon
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the same bottom with the *Gentiles, &c.* And on the other hand, for the Nations to renounce the Rites, Customs, and Religion of their Countrey, to which they had been zealously devoted from their Youth, and instead thereof to embrace a plain and simple Religion, a Religion opposite to their prevailing Passions, Lusts and Interests, &c. nothing could be more against the grain. In such a case as this we cannot wonder, if extraordinary Commissions and Service were thought necessary; but I need not tell you, that this is not the case of Christian Countries at this day.

4. Nor were the First Preachers of the Gospel to conflict only with the prejudices of private Persons, but likewise with the armed Power of Kingdoms and States, I might say with that of the whole *Roman Empire*. You know, what furious and bloody opposition, was at first made against our holy Religion; and how many Calamities the bare Profession of it, subjected Men to. Under such circumstances, some extraordinary means might be necessary for keeping Men tight to the Profession and Practice of Christianity, when they lay under so many and so great detriments from the World. But neither is this our case: We are, God be praised, in peaceable possession, as I may say, of the Christian Religion. It is in a manner Incorporated into our Laws, and become a part of our civil Property; nor are the times so bad, but the Profession and Practice of Christian Vertues still remain honourable.

5. The duty of Preaching the Gospel was indispensibly laid upon the Apostles, insomuch that they could by no means be excused the Service, upon this account, *St Paul* declares, *That necessity was laid upon him, and so he to him if he did not Preach the Gospel.* And *St. Peter* and *St. John* told the Council plainly, when they forbade them to Preach, *That they must obey God rather than man: For they could not but speak the things which they had seen and heard.* They were chosen to be Witnesses to the World of our Saviour's Works and Resurrection, and the grand business of pro-

pagating the Christian Faith, together with the care of the Nascēt Church, lay upon their single shoulders: so that if they had deserted their Commission and Entrustment, the great design of propagating the Christian Faith, must, humanly speaking, have fallen to the ground. But what is this to ordinary Ministers in these Ages? The fate of particular Churches, much less of the whole Church, does not now depend upon either the Preaching or Silence of a few particular Persons.

I will not trouble you with any further particulars of this kind. Upon the foot of what has been said, I think we may conclude in these few Observations: First, That there is a great difference between the state of the Church in the days of the Apostles, and the state of the Church in Christian Countries in these Ages. Secondly, That there was much greater occasion for Preaching, in the days of the Apostles, than there can be pretended to be in Christian Countries in these Ages. Thirdly, That the qualifications or degrees of Preaching, do in their nature follow the state of the Church for the time being, and are to be accommodated thereto: and therefore, that as the necessity or use of Preaching, will rise higher or sink lower, proportionably as there is greater or lesser occasion for it in the Church; so, the Texts of Scripture that relate to this matter, are to be interpreted accordingly.

It may perhaps be Objected against what I have said; That Vice and Corruption of manners, is more prevailing in this Age, than it was in the First Age of Christianity; and that this consideration will balance all that can be offered to make out a greater necessity for Preaching, at the entrance of our Religion than at this day, and will render Preaching as necessary now, as it was then. Now that the Age we live in is Vicious enough, I do not deny; but that it is more Vicious than the Age in which the Christian Religion made its entrance into the World, is more easily said than proved. Some Men have in all Ages exclaimed against their own times, and deemed them worse than those

those that went before. Whether this Opinion proceeds from the excessive esteem People generally have for the Ages past, or from the Tradition of the *Golden*, and following Ages Successively, degenerating more and more, or from what other Cause, I am not concern'd to enquire. But if we consider the thing exactly, there seems to be too much fondness and partiality in the Sentence. I do not see how Men can Judge equally, whether a former Age were better or worse than the present, unless they were as well acquainted with the state of things, and manners of Men in the one, as they are in the other: which I think 'tis almost impossible for them to be. How little do we know of former Ages (especially those very remote) in comparison of what we know of our own: and how weak an Impression do the former, in comparison of the latter, usually make upon us: and therefore how easie is it to be mistaken in such case. But what becomes of this Objection, if the Age wherein Christianity was first planted, were more Vicious and deprav'd than the present. I do not say that it was, or that it was not. The thing does not clearly enough appear to me one way or other; though it may be observed, that several Judicious Men have esteemed the Age wherein our Lord came into the World, an Age degenerate in the highest degree, and almost Universally Corrupted in Religion and Manners, for which reason (amongst others) they apprehended it to be called *the Fullness of Time*. But be that how it will; for my part, I am not willing to take for granted either the one or the other, because of the uncertainty we are at, in making a true estimate in the Case; but will at present content my self to suppose them equally Vicious. And upon the foot of that supposition, the odds will remain on the part of the former, as I have before observed; and consequently, there will appear a greater Necessity or Use for Preaching then, than there is now.

If, against what I have said, it be urged, that 'tis a good Rule, That all Ministers should imitate the Example of the Apostles, and that, *Assiduity of Preaching* is recommended by their Example, For *they ceased not to Teach and Preach Jesus Christ daily in the Temple, and in every house*, Acts 5. It's true, the Apostles being dismissed from the Council at *Jerusalem*, and having been charged by the Council not to Preach any more, did not thereupon cease to Preach. And I think I have already given a sufficient reason, (to go no further now) why they neither could nor ought to forbear Preaching. I do agree, that the Example of the Apostles deserves Imitation: But still, they are to be imitated with discretion. For if Men now-a-days, forgetting what Station or juncture of times themselves are in, go about to imitate the Apostles in every minute circumstance of their Ministration, they may easily run into mistakes. It were easie to confirm this Observation by several Instances from Scripture, and you may if you please, take the Text now before us for one. For I leave it to any reasonable Man to judge, whether by vertue of this Text, the Preachers of this Age be obliged to Preach *daily*; or whether they be obliged, in Christian Countries where Churches and Benefices are settled, to Preach *in every House*, or as the words may be render'd, *from House to House*. No-body can be so weak as to hold the Affirmative. Thus, should a Man argue, That because the Apostles at their first mission into *Judea*, were commanded by our Lord, *Not to possess gold, or silver, or brass in their purses*, Mat. 10. therefore Ministers now are not to keep any ready mony by them: Or, because St. Paul at *Troas* Preached *all* (or great part of the) *day until midnight*, Acts 20. and at *Rome* *from morning till evening*, Acts 28. that therefore Ministers now ought to make Sermons Eight or Twelve Hours long: I say, should a Man draw such inferences as these, he would scarce be thought to deserve an answer. The like might be instanced in other particulars. I need not tell you over again,

again, That the Text just now first alledg'd, and other such like, ought to be interpreted by the rule of *Consideratis considerandis*, I mean with a regard to the reason of things, and Analogy or difference of Cases.

Suppose therefore we go soberly to work, and from this Text of the Apostle's, preaching *daily in the Temple, and in every House*; or from other Texts of like nature, we infer only thus much, That Ministers now, are diligently and frequently to instruct the Christian People committed to their Care: What can we, upon sure grounds, conclude, in particular, from thence? By what Rules shall we define exactly, what must be deemed frequent Preaching, and what not? The very notion of Frequency is relative and indefinite. The same thing may be called Frequent, under some Respects and Comparisons, which under other Respects and Comparisons would lose that Denomination. Thus, for instance: Preaching once a Month may be stiled Frequent, when compared with Preaching but three or four times a Year; but would lose the Denomination of Frequent, if compared with Preaching once a Week: So also Preaching once a Week might be called Frequent, when compared with Preaching but once a month; but would quickly lose that Denomination, by being compared with a Preaching twice a Week, joined perhaps with a weekly Lecture or two, over and above. Take the notion of Frequent with regard to other things; thus: Men generally think they communicate frequently at the Lord's Table, if they do so once in a Month; and this may be deemed Frequent Communicating, if compared with the Practice of others, who communicate (suppose) but three times in a Year: But, on the other hand, it will scarce be deemed Frequent, when compared with the Practice of the ancient Christians, who communicated almost every day. But at the same time, many of those very Persons, who think monthly Communion Frequent, will not perhaps be easily persuaded that they hear
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Sermons frequently, unless they hear them once or twice a Week, or oftner. Now whether Men do, in these Cases, judge of the Frequency of Things, by steady Principles, or only by precarious ones, is no hard matter to discern. To speak freely, I cannot, for my part, see any thing to hinder, but that they who will not allow Preaching once or twice a Week to be frequent, may at length, if they please, to compleat the notion of Frequency, come to expect Sermons every day, and in process of time, exchange the solid Practice of Vertue, for Discourse and Speculation.

If it be further urged, That St. Paul exhorts and charges Timothy (and in him, all Ministers) *to preach the Word; to be instant in season, out of season; to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine*: And that by these Words is meant a diligent and assiduous Preaching; the variety of the Terms here used, signifying the Frequency and Ardency the Preacher is to use. To this, I have several things to offer: Let us consider these Words, first as they relate immediately to Timothy; and then as they may relate to other Ministers, that have been, are, or shall be in the Church: First, as they relate principally to Timothy, they contain, in general, an Exhortation or Command given to him, To be diligent in preaching and asserting the Christian Faith. The latter part of the Verse seems to be spoken distributively, comprehending the variety of Matter incident to the Discourse of a Preacher; That he should *reprove*, [or confute] viz. the erroneous and gain-saying; *rebuke*, viz. the vicious and depraved; *exhort*, [or comfort] viz. the honest and vertuously inclined; and, in short, perform the part of a Preacher with due Lenity and Constancy, applying Doctrines suitable to the several Conditions or Cases of the Persons he might have to deal with. The former part of the Verse, runs in more general terms. And for the Words *In season, out of season*, I am apt to think they bear an allusion to that in the Prophet, spoken of the Prophets or Preachers

chers under the Jewish Law, *Jer. 25. 4. Chap. 29. 19. Chap. 35. 15. I have sent unto you all my Servants the Prophets, rising up early and sending them:* That is, I have sent many Prophets amongst you, at divers times and seasons, as well when ye were disposed to receive their Instructions, as when ye were not: They called upon you, early and late, to repent, but you would not. But whether you admit of this Allusion, or not, the plain meaning of the Words, *In season, out of season*, seems to be, as the most Learned Dr. Hammond notes upon the place, That *Timothy* should urge and press upon the Christian Profelytes, the wholesome Doctrines and Precepts of the Christian Faith, as well when they should be ready and willing to hear, when he should have opportunity and vacancy to fasten any thing upon them, as likewise when he should not have such probable Opportunities, under the Hopes that he might, any ways, convince them, and reduce them to the knowledge of Truth, and practice of Vertue. In short, the meaning of the whole seems to be couched in the Words which *S. Paul* just after uses, *viz.* That he should *do the Work of an Evangelist, and make full proof of his Ministry.* Thus these Words relate immediately to *Timothy*: And as the case of *Timothy*, who lived in the Infancy of the Church, is plainly, within the compass of those Points of Difference which I have before touched on, relating to the Infancy of the Church: So, I confess, *when Men will not endure sound Doctrine, but after their own Lusts, heap to themselves Teachers, having itching Ears,* (which is the Reason with which *St. Paul* enforces this Precept to *Timothy*: For, says he in the next Words, *the time will come when Men will not endure sound Doctrine, &c.*) that then the diligent preaching of lawful Ministers, seems, from the reason of things, to be more necessary than ordinary.

Next, let us consider these Words as they may, by analogy of Reason, relate to Ministers, in all succeeding Ages of the Church. Suppose that under that Relation, they import
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an Exhortation, or Command to Ministers, To be diligent in their Function ; to take all fit Opportunities, and even those that seem to be less fit and promising, of declaring and inculcating the Doctrines and Precepts of the Christian Religion ; to convince Gain-sayers ; to reprove and rebuke the erroneous and obstinate ; to exhort and encourage honest and well-minded People : In a word, to apply unto Men the Doctrines and Precepts of the Gospel seasonably and skilfully. But now, what Consequences shall we fetch from hence ? Is there no other way of declaring and inculcating the Doctrines and Precepts of Christianity, but by the Commentaries or Discourses of the Pulpit ? Is not that done by reading the sacred Books in our Churches, and likewise by writing things useful and beneficial to the Souls of Men ? May not Errours be refuted, bad Men rebuked, and good Men comforted and encouraged in Vertue, by reading the Bible, and hearing it read, as well as by Sermons of Men's composition ? It is both unjust, with respect to God, and untrue, with respect to the Bible it self, to suppose, That every thing contained therein, needs Explication. God Almighty, in the holy Books, speaks to Men as plainly as they can do to one another. Bating for some Obscurities arising from the difference between the Genius of the style wherein the Scriptures are written, and that of modern Languages in use amongst us at this day, and for some few other particulars, which I need not mention now. The Scriptures, generally speaking, are so plain and intelligible, That he who will but bring to the reading of them a just Sincerity of Mind, mix'd with a just Discretion, cannot easily fail of understanding them. At least, 'tis agreed, That essential and necessary Things, are plainly delivered therein, which is sufficient for my present purpose. Here is indeed, in the Text now before us, the Phrase, *Preach the Word* ; and we are, by Custom, used to connect the Idea of Preaching, with the Idea of a Pulpit ; but, in truth, there is not such an immediate and necessary relation betwixt them. He that reads a Chapter,

pter, or a Homily, in the Church, preaches, as well as he that pronounces a Sermon: *Noah* and *Solomon* were Preachers, though it may be neither of them ever came into a Pulpit; and *St. Paul*, and the other holy Penmen of Scripture, preach to us by the Writings which they have left behind them, as well as they did to those who heard the sound of their Voice: Though dead, they continue to speak and preach to us. But I will not trouble you with an enlargement on these Considerations.

As to what is inferred, from the variety of the Terms used in this Exhortation, or Command of *St. Paul* to *Timothy*, I think it is of little weight; I have already intimated enough to make it appear a much more reasonable Construction, That the variety of Terms here used, only signifies how a Minister's Discourses should be diversified, and take in such general Heads from whence Persons, in various Cases, may receive advantage. One Discourse may contain matter of Reproof, Rebuke, and Exhortation, as well as ten. All the Use then, that can, with respect to the present Argument, be fairly made of this Text, must be drawn from the Words, *Be instant, in season, out of season*. And what may most reasonably be understood by them, I have already shewn: But can we from them conclude, upon any good Grounds, how often, in particular, Ministers are obliged to preach? whether once a Month, once a Fortnight, or once a Week, or oftner, or seldomer? He that can clearly see in this Text a Direction for such Particulars as these, has, in my Opinion, an extraordinary Eye-sight.

Nor can any thing before-said be fairly interpreted, as tending to render Preaching unnecessary in the Church in this Age. Should one argue, That Preaching is not

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now of such Account, as 'twas in the Infancy of the Church; that does not imply, that 'tis useless; and of no Account at all. Though a Thing be not of value in the proportion of Ten, it may nevertheless be of value in the proportion of Three, Four, or Five. However, the **Difference** we owe to **Truth** and **Reason**, obliges us to estimate Things according to their just Rate: But I need not mention any thing of this nature to you, whose Candour and Judgment sufficiently secure me from all Apprehensions of Misconstruction.

Thus, Sir, I have given you my Thoughts in short, upon your First Enquiry; and have examined the principal **OBJECTIONS** I could think of, that might be made against what I had offered. The main Use that I would make of the fore-going **CONSIDERATIONS**, is to shew, That in interpreting the Scriptures, as in many other Cases, so also in this before us, we are not barely to have regard to particular Phrases, or Expressions, but to consider withal the Differences of Persons and Times respectively, the true Nature of Commands and Examples, and the Analogy and Reason of Things; that so we do not argue or infer at a Venture, lest our Conclusion run higher than the Analogy and Reason of Things will bear. You see I have not pretended to determine how much **PREACHING** may be necessary at this Day; how often, or how seldom Ministers are to Preach; nor how long, or how short their **SERMONS** should be; nor any thing of that kind. It is not for me to prescribe in this Case; they who have Authority to do it, may, if they please. And though I have not laid down any particular Assertions upon the present Subject, yet I imagine, That the fore-going **CONSIDERATIONS** will, by natural and easie Induction, afford some **Notions** which may be helpful to remove several **Vulgar** Mis-

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Misapprehensions relating to these Matters. I'll give you no further Trouble at present, but refer the Consideration of your Second Enquiry to my next, which you shall have very speedily. I am,

Decemb. 10.
1691.

S I R,

Your, &c.

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Second Letter.

S I R,

I Understand by Mr. N.... that you have received my last of the Tenth of *December*; and I hoped you would, by this time, have let me know what your Apprehensions are, concerning the Contents of it. Though you have not been pleased to gratifie my Curiosity in that kind, yet both my Readiness to obey your Commands, and the Promise I made you at the End of my Last, oblige me to undertake what remains of the Task you were pleased not long ago to impose upon me: In reference whereto, I am now to consider the matter of your Second Enquiry, which relates to the Hearing of Sermons. And there being such an immediate and necessary Relation betwixt Preaching and Hearing; as that Preaching supposes somebody to Hear; and again, Hearing supposes somebody to Preach. This Enquiry seems naturally co-incident with the former, and may properly be considered in the next place.

I know, Sir, you are far from thinking, as some People seem to do, That Preaching is only a matter of Form, and the necessary Exercise of the Preachers Profession. And, on the other hand, I allow my self to believe, That you are not so excessively addicted to the Hearing of Sermons, as to esteem that a thing of equal Account with the substantial Offices of Piety and Vertue. If I thought you were really under such an Apprehension, I would take some Pains to state that
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matter to you at large. But I reckon I may fairly save my self that Labour. However, because your present enquiry makes some kind of Competition, between the Pulpit and the Desk, I shall (as you desire) give you some short reflections upon that Head. Not that I intend to oppose the Pulpit and the Desk one to the other, or by giving preference unto the one, to detract from the just value of the other. But as of two Good Things, one may peradventure be more, and the other less Good : so, to discover whether of the two is of greater value, it may be fit to make a Comparison between them, and to put each as it were into its proper Scale. 'Tis manifest, a good thing may be overvalued ; we say, *One may buy Gold too dear*. And if it were not of any ill consequence to overvalue a good thing, as it generally proves when 'tis overvalued at the price of things of a higher nature : yet Prudence requires, that we do, as near as we can, set a true value upon things, not sinking them below, or advancing them above their just Rate ; and there is a kind of Justice in so doing. He that praises another Man beyond his real merit, is accounted injurious both to the Truth, and to the Person praised. The reason is the same with respect to Things as Persons.

But for the better discussion of this matter, it seemeth necessary to consider severally the Nature of each of these two things, we would compare together. To which end I would premise these few Considerations. You know, the whole Duty of Mankind, is usually represented under the general Heads of Piety and Probity : the former containing all those particular Duties which more immediately relate to God Almighty ; The latter, those which relate to Mankind, that is, to our selves and others. This distinction of Piety and Probity, answers to, and is the same in substance with that other

ther pretty much used by Divines, of the Duties of the First and Second Table. And though in truth the several Vertues which do together make up the Summ of our Duty, have, generally considered, a Cognation to each other reciprocally, and are, as it were, entwined in one another; so as that Piety, for instance, may be called a *Justitia adversus Deum*, and in its general Notion, take in all those Vertues whereby Men are brought to a Conformity to the Divine Nature, viz. Justice, Goodness, Patience, &c. (in which case it mixes it self with the respective Offices of Probity): yet I chuse at present to make use of the beforementioned distinction as already explained, because it is generally known, and may without any labour of thought be distinctly apprehended. These general Duties of Piety and Probity, are immediately founded upon the Eternal and Immutable Laws both of Natural and Revealed Religion; so that nothing can have a more solid Basis. They are Good Intrinsically and in themselves. And as the Summ of Practical Religion consists in the just performance of these Duties: so the Habit and Practice of them, constitute a Man a Good Man; and one cannot be a Good Man without them; or if you will in plain terms, a Man cannot be truly Pious and Vertuous without Piety and Virtue.

Now the Office of Divine Worship is to be look'd on as an Essential (and indeed a considerable) part of Piety; and therefore, as immediately founded upon the same before-mentioned Immutable Laws with it: In acknowledging the Being of GOD Almighty, we do in the same breath acknowledge an Obligation to Worship Him. It is also to be considered; as a thing that has in it a Radical and Intrinseck Goodness: 'Tis a thing good Intrinsically and in it self, to render Veneration and Worship to the Supreme Being. And
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(he just performance of it, due requisites concurring for that I suppose all along) denominates a Man a Good man; that is to say, so far as one part of Religion can so denominate; I mean, it makes a Real and Essential part of the Character of a Good man. I would now be understood of Publick Worship, and I speak chiefly of it, partly because (for reasons not to be mentioned now) I esteem it of greater account than Private Worship (still allowing to Private, its due Place and Price); and partly because the consideration of it is more immediately concerned in your Enquiry.

On the other side, see whether these high Characters will besit the Office, or Act of Hearing a Sermon? Is that an Essential part of Piety? Is it immediately founded upon the Eternal and Immutable Laws of Religion? Has it in it a Radical and Intrinsic Goodness? Does the just performance of it, make a Real and Essential part of the Character of a Good Man? 'Tis very obvious to observe, that Hearing of Sermons is rather an Instrument to promote Piety and Vertue, than a necessary part thereof. It is for the sake of Holyness and Vertue; but is not of it self either Holyness or Vertue. I do not make the comparison between a just and regular performance of Devotion on the one hand, and a vicious or faulty Hearing of Sermons on the other: I put the case even in that respect on both sides, and suppose due requisites concurring to the latter as well as to the former. That being presupposed, the Summ of that Goodness which the latter imports, appears to be only relative: 'tis Good as a means, not as the End. Thus, 'tis a Good thing to hear a Sermon; but why? not meerly for the sake of it self, but in order to something better; to wit, in order to the

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the acquiring the knowledge of Truth, and the habits of Piety and Vertue. Every Body sees, that 'tis not an Essential part of the Character of a Good Man, that he be a diligent hearer of Sermons; for if one should suppose, there may be a Good Man who never heard a Sermon in his Life, there would be no Repugnancy in the Notion of the thing: but now, the Essential Character of a Good Man, is, That he be truly Pious and Devout towards God, and exercise a lively Charity, Justice, Goodness, Generosity, Temperance, Meekness, Patience, and the like Vertues, towards men; that is, in short, that he perform justly the Essential Offices of Piety and Vertue: and one cannot suppose a man to be a Good man, without such-like Vertues, at least in such a degree respectively as may be effectual to give that Denomination; if one should suppose it, there would evidently appear a Repugnancy in the very Notion; for then a man would be supposed to be Good, without having that which alone can make him such, and so would be supposed to be Good without Goodness, that is, Good and not Good at the same time. It is confessed, a Good man may be a diligent hearer of Sermons; but still, 'tis not That that Constitutes him such, but the Vertues of the Divine Life. The natural and highest end of Hearing Sermons, is for Mens direction and encouragement in the practice of Piety and Probity. And although to receive instruction or encouragement for the right performance of Divine Worship, be not the whole end of hearing Sermons: Yet the right performance of Divine Worship, being an essential part of that Complex or Whole, To wit, Piety and Probity, taken as aforesaid, for the Summ of our Duty, I say, being an essential part of that whole which is the End, it is to be allowed a preference before that, which has only the nature of the means: and by how much the greater proportion such essential part bears

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to the Whole, which is the end; by so much the more justly is it to be preferred before that which is only the means of that End. Thus for instance, Though Justice be but a part of Probity, and Probity it self but a part of what (as above distributed) we call the Whole Duty of Man, and the end of Preaching; yet we readily allow an Act of Justice to be of much higher account and value than hearing a Sermon; because Justice is a Necessary and Essential part of that Whole which makes up our Duty, and is a thing intrinsically and irrespectively Good, and is immediately founded upon the immutable first Principles of the natural Law, whereas the other is not of so noble a Parentage: and the higher such Act of Justice is in its nature, by so much hath it a more evident right of Preference. The like may be said, by like reason of Charity, or other principal Vertue under the general Head of Probity: and also, by like reason of Divine Worship, under the general Head of Piety.

The foregoing Notions are so clear and evident of themselves, that they want no explication. And therefore I think it will be needless (especially to a Person of your acuteness) to insist any longer on the general Considerations before-mentioned, or to dilate upon the several particulars which flow from thence; or to take any pains to shew, either upon what particular accounts, hearing of Sermons is said to have the nature of a thing instrumentally, rather than Essentially Good; or upon what particular accounts it may more properly be referred to positive Institution, than to the Principles of natural Religion, or the like: Where things are sufficiently plain, 'tis superfluous to bestow the pains of Commenting.

Nor will it be of any weight against what I have before offer'd, to urge, That hearing of Sermons is an Act of Piety,

Piety, as well as Divine Worship is. For if one should be so liberal as to admit it to be so, it will not follow from thence, that the Former of these is of equal Consideration with the Latter. A thing may in a general and remote respect partake of the same kind with another, and yet not be in the same degree of Value and Dignity with that other. There are degrees of Worth and Value, resulting from the nature of things, by which they ought to be estimated.

I think I shall not easily be misunderstood by you in what I have said upon this Subject. I do not design to represent the hearing of Sermons, as a thing useless or insignificant, nor will any thing that I have offer'd, fairly bear such a Construction. I have already acknowledged, and do it over again, that it is very useful and beneficial. You see plainly, I am not considering the hearing of Sermons Absolutely and in it self, but Comparatively. All that I at present desire to be granted me, is, That the performance of Divine Worship is in it self a thing of higher account than it; and therefore ought not, generally speaking, to be postponed to, but preferred before it.

And in this matter, I think I have on my side the Universal and Concurring consent of Mankind. For publick Worship is, and always was accounted, the great End for which Churches and such like places, dedicated to the Divine Honour, have been erected, which shews, That Mankind have always had a principal regard to it. So it was under the *Jewish* Oeconomy in particular. For it's said in the Old Testament, (as my Lord Bacon well observes) *My House shall be called the House of Prayer*; but no where the House of Preaching. So also in the Christian Church, there were in all Ages (for ought we know) stated times of publick Prayer. Nor was it in

former Ages thought necessary, that publick Prayer should always be attended with Preaching. The Christians in those times, could frequent the Church, not only for the entertainment of their Ears, but for the performance of their Devotion; their active Piety disposing them to a constant and regular celebration of the publick Offices of Divine Worship.

But I suppose I need not for further confirmation, enlarge on the practice of the Ancient Christian Church in the early times of Christianity (after the Christian Religion was settled and became National): Or put you in mind, how long it was, after such settlement, that the use of Homilies, or set Sermons came up (for ought we can find); when before their publick Offices consisted, chiefly of Prayer, Communicating, and of Reading the Scriptures (which latter by the way, I take to be the true sort of Preaching, and most properly so called): It would be too long to insist on these and such like Considerations, in so clear a Case.

I am not ignorant, that there are several specious Mediums used by some with vulgar People, to raise the price of Pulpit-discourses; As by stiling them Spiritual Manna, The Bread of Life, and such like: nor do I think it worth the while to consider, whether there be any good warrant for these Appellations. He that will but read the 6th. Chap. of St. John's Gospel, will find, that these Appellations do much more properly belong to our Lord Himself. But tis wonderful to observe, how profoundly some Men prove the Efficacy and Usefulness of their Preaching, by instances taken out of Holy Writ, of the great numbers that were at once converted to the Faith by the Preaching of the Apostles. Now these instances do indeed prove the extraordinary assistances afforded to the Apostles, and the Efficacy of their Ministry.

nistry. But what is that to these Men? Have they such Commission and Assistances as the Apostles had? Have they any promise, that such Success shall attend their Preaching, as did that of the Apostles? Did ever any such Success in fact attend their Preaching? Or is it possible in the nature of the thing, that it should? What though our Lord says, *Lo I am with you always unto the end of the World*? Does that signifie, either that the Church shall be *Infallible*, or that the Preaching of Ordinary Ministers in all Ages shall work wonders? It were well if Men would give their minds to estimate things, without prejudice or fond conceit, and infer no more from such instances as they take out of Scripture, than what can fairly be inferred thence.

Now whilst I reflect upon such Considerations as these, it seems to me hard to conceive, upon what grounds either in Reason or Religion, many Men have taken up the notions they seem to have about this matter: when they declare, sometimes in words, but more often by their practice, that the principal end of their going to Church, is to hear the Sermon; that if there be no Sermon, they have nothing to do there: Or if the Preacher be such as either they do not like, or cannot, as they fanfie, Edifie by, they may well be excused for staying away; that they perform the publick Offices of Piety on the Lord's Day, or other solemn times well enough, if they present themselves in the Church to hear the Sermon, though without concurring in the Offices of Divine Worship. The absurdity of these conceits sufficiently appears at first sight: and for my part, I am so far of another mind, that I freely profess, I should think my self under a solid Obligation to go duly to Church, though there were not a Sermon Preached there throughout the Year. And I am perswaded, that he who seriously considers the fundamental Obligations that lie upon mankind, to
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render Homage and Veneration to the Supreme Being, with the just motives that enforce the same, will see reason to be of the same mind.

It is not in my temper to be forward to Accuse, or to Aggravate where there may be a mistake: nor am I willing to speak any thing higher upon this occasion, than that I heartily wish, that they (if any such there be) who admire the Persons of men, and value themselves upon the multitude of Sermons which they hear, would be so kind to themselves, as to reflect seriously upon their own minds, and examine, whether they are not in a great measure influenced in this case, by the empty desire of multiplicity and variety of Discourse, by the Entertainment which the Preacher gives to their Ears or Affections, or other like motives extrinseck to solid Vertue and Religion. When men are incessantly hunting after new Discourses, and must have Truths delivered to them in Variety of Thought and Expression, 'tis a shrewd sign they are too much under the power of Fancy and Curiosity. 'Tis the wanton Palate and weak Stomach, that must have variety of Meats and Condiments. I know you will concur with me in wishing, that men generally were as vehement in their endeavours to remember and practise what they hear, as they are in their desires of hearing more; this would produce a lively and substantial Vertue, and make men less fond of that airy sort of Piety, which chiefly hovers in the Brain, or floats with the uncertain Tides of the Affections; which, every Body knows, the Breath of an Oratour or Pathetical Preacher, can variously move and agitate.

I must confess, a good Discourse carries in it such a charm and engagement, that 'tis vastly delightful to a Rational mind: but withal it must be remembred, That know-

knowledge owes great part of its excellency to the relation it has to Practice ; and that the Religion which we Profess, is not to be considered meerly as a Science, but chiefly as a System of Rules and Precepts , for the Government of our Lives.

The Summ is this, I am altogether of their mind, who though they have a due value for the Pulpit, yet are desirous to give other things their just weight : Who attend diligently to the Discourses of the Pulpit, and receive what is there Preached, with Modesty and Candour, and yet with Caution and Judgment : who hear Sermons not barely for the little ends of furnishing Discourse, either upon the Subject, or (much less) upon the Preacher ; but out of sincere Love to Truth and Vertue, that is, with a resolution to rectifie their Sentiments, and reform their Manners by what they hear : who go to Church principally, to Worship Almighty God with a pure Mind, and secondarily, to hear such Doctrines and Instructions as may be useful to them, for regulating their Opinions and Practices. Who remember on the one hand, that their Prayers will not be acceptable to God, unless they be accompanied with true Vertue and Holiness of Life ; and that on the other hand, 'twill be of no avail to them to hear many Sermons, unless they put in practice the Precepts of the Gospel. In a word, who place the Essence of Vertue and Religion in true devotion towards God, joyned with an exact and sincere Conformity to His Laws in Heart and Life.—— I am really,

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Your, &c.

January 2.
1691.

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